International Journal for Electronic Crime Investigation

ISSN: 2522-3429 (Print)
ISSN: 2616-6003 (Online)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.54692/ijeci.2024.0803202

Vol. 8 issue 3 Jul-Sep 2024

Role of Parent-Adolescent Communication to Prevent Cyberbullying in Youth: Challenges and Opportunities

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Received: Jul 19, 2024; **Accepted:** Aug 02, 2024; **Published:** Sep 12, 2024

ABSTRACT

The rise of digital technology and social networks has caused an increased rate of cyberbullying cases, predominantly among adolescents. Problematic use of the internet and cyberbullying have had important psychological, social, and emotional impacts on youth, making it a tenacious concern for educators, parents, and policymakers. Effective parent-adolescent/youth communication arises as an essential approach to alleviating the risks and effects of cyberbullying. This review study aims to explore the role of open and helpful communication between youth and parents to avoid cyberbullying. Investigating the various communication approaches and their effect on youthful behavior, the review augments the importance of adopting a helpful and thoughtful environment at homes and educational institutes. The review suggests that youths who are involved in regular frank discussions with parents and teachers about online activities are less prone to cyberbullying. Moreover, the study stresses the need for parents and teachers to be well-familiar with digital/social platforms and cyberbullying dynamics to successfully guide the youth. Educating the parents, teachers,

and youth aimed at enlightening communication skills amongst youths, parents and teachers demonstrates promise in decreasing the cyberbullying cases in Pakistan. Therefore, this manuscript intends to explore approaches that involve universities, digital platforms, and communities to support parent-adolescent communication to create safe online environments for the youth.

Keywords: Digital technology, social networks, cyberbullying, youth, universities, parent-adolescent communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Navigating the variety of digital challenges that today's youth face requires a comprehensive strategy. A complex online environment is created by factors such as cyberbullying, peer pressure, social media pressure, online privacy issues, academic pressures, mental health effects, and changing peer relationships. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers, and the community at large to promote responsible digital use, encourage open communication, and offer direction. The young generation needs to be taught how to positively exploit digital technology while reducing any possible risks by tackling these problems head-on. It is found that parental communication with teenagers protects them from cyberbullying. Students who had not experienced cyberbullying are reported more likely to have open contact with their parents, according to a study done on high school students in Valencia, Spain. Students who had occasionally or severely experienced cyberbullying were more likely to engage in avoidant communication. Beyond the consequences of parents' online supervision, there was a negative correlation between cyberbullying victimization and perpetration and parent-child connectivity as indicated by open communication. This shows that having a solid relationship with honest communication may be more crucial than keeping an eye on young people's internet activity [1, 2].

Communication between parents and children has its key significance in preventing cyberbullying and safeguarding against its adverse consequences. For example, parents purposefully allowed their kids to see things in their way when cyberbullying happened in the southern United States. Additionally, they wished for their kids to understand the possible causes of cyberbullying i.e. dysfunctional families and lowered self-esteem. Parents also used communication techniques to give their kids more authority. They introduced to their kids the value of resisting bullies and standing up for others who are weak. They also attempted to foster a feeling of self-assurance in their skills. A qualitative study is required to comprehend how parents' techniques may differ from those of parents in Western cultures, given the emphasis on collective interdependence in Eastern cultures, such as India [3].

Talking to parents is a useful coping mechanism when students are facing cyberbullying, however, Cassidy et al. found a disparity between adolescent reports of cyberbullying (32% victimization: 36% perpetration) and parents' understanding of cyberbullying (11% aware of cyberbullying events) in a mixed methods research of parents and children (6th – 9th grade) in England. These results suggest that young people don't always tell their parents about

incidents of online harassment. The study also showed that parents thought they could enforce rules more strictly and that their children were engaging in less cyberbullying than the young people reported. In a follow-up study, the researchers discovered that the degree to which parents were ignorant of their children's Internet usage both positively correlated and predicted the behaviors of cyberbullying. Young people may choose not to ask for adult assistance because they don't think adults can effectively step in or because they worry about losing access to their electronics. Without adult assistance, young people are more prone to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms like avoidance, turning into cyberbullies themselves, or taking violent revenge on the offender(s). All of these could contribute to an increase in cyberbullying [4, 5, 6].

Vignettes can draw attention to challenges in distinguishing between acceptable and inappropriate use of social media and the Internet. As is often the case with human behavior, there is a spectrum that spans Internet use from normal to problematic [7, 8, 9]. Parents, teachers, and clinicians may find it difficult to distinguish between normal and problematic online activity when 95% of US teens go online daily and 45% go online almost constantly [10]. Additionally, adolescents frequently engage in media multitasking, with over 50% engaging in multiple media activities at a given time, such as being online and watching TV [11]. Overuse of the Internet in kids has been linked to anxiety and depression, difficulty sleeping, poor academic performance, difficulty adjusting to social situations, and even a higher risk of suicide [12, 13, 14, 15].

The 18-item Problematic and Risky Internet Usage Screening Scale (PRIUSS-18) evaluates social impairment, emotional impairment, and risky/impulsive Internet usage, therefor, standardized and accurate screening is essential for adolescent and young adult populations [16, 17, 18, 19]. Using a 5-item measure (never = 0, seldom = 1, occasionally = 2, often = 3, very often = 4), individuals who score 25 or higher are considered to be at risk for PRIU. Compared to use for business or education, there is a stronger correlation between PRIU symptoms and leisure Internet use. It should come as no surprise that individuals with symptoms of inattention had the strongest correlation with the risky/impulsive usage domain.

A variety of parenting techniques are recommended by experts to reduce cyberbullying and improve internet safety. Parenting at its most successful might involve putting a lot of focus on autonomy and active media monitoring. -According to O'Connor et al. [20], media parenting is defined as "goal-directed parent behaviors or interactions with their child about media to influence some aspect of the youth's screen media use behaviors." Throughout adolescence, parents and children naturally work out boundaries—including restrictions on online activities—as children want to become more independent and parents want to protect them. Parents and children display a diversity of patterns in these talks, but households, where parents exert high control and adolescents, push for high autonomy are likely to experience the most conflict [21]. A balanced approach may be best, as one study found that youth who reported high levels of parental control were also likely to report high levels of cyberbullying [22]. In another study, Padilla-Walker et al. found that autonomy-supportive media parenting (whether active or restrictive) was associated with high media disclosure. Finally, the study found that when children voluntarily tell their parents about their online activities, they

tend to engage in more pro-social activities and less relational aggression [23].

Research focusing on the consequences of cyberbullying has also revealed potential safeguards for media parenting practices, like keeping an eye on their children's online activity. Using technology controls or house rules to limit media consumption is one example of restrictive parenting. According to research by the Pew Institute, most parents keep an eye on their teenagers on social media (up to 61%) and frequently check their calls or texts (48%). Parent-child conversations on media usage and active media use together, or co-use, are referred to as active mediation [24, 25, 26]. Parents are less likely to actively teach or discuss online behavior with their teens (40%) than they are when it comes to restrictive media parenting.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature shows that there are differing opinions about the effects of restrictive media monitoring on cyberbullying. This can be the case because parents may set greater boundaries if they are aware of cyberbullying. Restrictive media monitoring was found to be less beneficial in longitudinal research than parent-child communication and connective co-use, or the active use of media together. Open communication such as asking someone where they're going tonight may be necessary when monitoring in person. "Who will you be with?" while internet surveillance can be carried out in silence (e.g., by watching videos on TikTok or by following accounts on Instagram without leaving comments). Some teenagers have indeed shown anger on social media when their father follows them or their pals [27].

Supporting autonomy at the same time may be essential to restrictive parenting techniques. Autonomy is a fundamental concept in the Model for Cyberbullying Motivation and Regulation. Children would be able to develop and learn if there was active dialogue and negotiation over media, especially as they got older. Empathy and self-control are fostered by active media parenting, and these traits have been linked to a decrease in aggressive and externalizing behavior as well as an increase in pro-social behavior. In general, positive parent-child interactions, open communication, and active media parenting are essential when paired with certain realistic limitations, including parental phone limits for young teenagers. However, placing too much focus on limitation and control can have unintended consequences [28].

Recognizing that the majority of teens and young adults live their lives online and that technological literacy is essential for their ability to function in the workplace, play, and academic settings would be a good place to start [29]. Accurately recording online behaviors and the related health and risk variables is one of the issues. Media use provides a wealth of information about patients, including their time management skills, interests, and desired public image. It also reveals information about their understanding of privacy settings, propensity for risky behavior, executive functioning, and behavior consequences awareness. Additionally, it provides an overview of their familial ties, uninspiringly features of their Internet use, number and quality of relationships, and cultural self-identification.

Clinicians establish a trusting relationship with patients/students to discuss their internet use habits openly [30], ensuring that patients/students feel comfortable and non-judged whilst discussing their internet habits [31] and employ validated assessment tools to quantify the degree of PIU [32]. Assess the physical and mental health influences of

extreme internet usage, like depression, sleep disturbances, and anxiety [33]. Clinicians give tips and guidelines for healthy usage of the internet [34] and explain the potential risks of excessive internet use and its consequences like addiction and its effect on mental health [35]. They create modified treatment strategies based on the precise needs and situations of each patient [36], psychoanalysis services, and support groups to help persons manage their internet use [37].

Educators recognize signs of unnecessary internet use and discuss the patterns of internet usage and its effects on routine life [38], i.e. social withdrawal or declining academic achievement [39]. Educators keep an eye on the academic performance of students and their social interactions to recognize potential issues [40]. They administer reviews to collect data on students' internet use [41] and combine training on digital literacy into the curriculum to help students understand the importance of balanced internet use [42] see Table 1. Educators inspire a balanced lifestyle that comprises physical activities and offline social communications [43] with the help of parents or guardians they support habits of healthy internet use in students [44] and implement broad programs within schools to motivate beneficial internet use and digital well-being [45].

Table 1: An approach for clinicians and educators to engage, assess, educate, and treat problematic internet use

Step	Role	Actions	Consequences
Engage	Clinicians	Build rapport with students or patients [46]	Create a non-judgmental but safe environment [47]
	Educators	Recognize signs of excessive internet use [48]	Start conversations about internet habits [49]
Assess	Clinicians	Conduct thorough evaluations using standardized tools [50]	Assess mental and physical health impact [51]
	Educators	Monitor academic performance and social interactions [52]	- Use surveys and questionnaires [53]
Educate	Clinicians	- Provide information on healthy internet use [54]	- Discuss risks associated with excessive use [55]
	Educators	- Integrate digital literacy into the curriculum [56]	- Promote awareness about a balanced lifestyle [57]
Treat	Clinicians	- Develop individualized treatment plans [58]	Offer counseling and support groups [59]
	Educators	- Collaborate with parents and guardians [60]	Implement school-wide programs [61]

Table 2: key aspects of establishing a therapeutic alliance with a young adult patient

Aspect	Individual Therapeutic Alliance	Alliance with Patients and Parents	References
Trust Building	Create a safe, confidential environment for open dialogue.	Foster transparency about the therapeutic process while respecting confidentiality.	[64, 65]
Active Listening	Validate the patient's feelings and concerns.	Encourage parents to listen to the patient's perspective without judgment.	[66, 67]
Goal Setting	Collaboratively set personal goals for therapy.	Involve both patient and parents in discussing goals, ensuring they are realistic and mutually agreed upon.	[68]
Communication	Use age-appropriate language and be mindful of non-verbal cues.	Facilitate open communication, encouraging questions and clarifications from both parties.	[69]
Empowerment	Encourage self-efficacy and independence in decision-making.	Support the patient's independence while educating parents about their support role.	[70]
Conflict Resolution	Address any misunderstandings directly and constructively.	Mediate discussions to resolve conflicts, focusing on the patient's needs and feelings.	[71]
Feedback Mechanisms	Regularly solicit feedback on the therapeutic process and adjust accordingly.	Create a forum for feedback that includes both patients and parents to ensure all voices are heard.	[72]
Cultural Sensitivity	Acknowledge and respect the patient's background and beliefs.	Recognize family dynamics and cultural factors that may influence treatment and interactions.	[73]
Follow-Up	Schedule regular sessions to maintain continuity of care.	Encourage family involvement in follow-up discussions to reinforce support outside therapy.	[74]
Confidentiality Respect	Maintain patient confidentiality to build trust.	Clarify the limits of confidentiality, especially regarding safety concerns or legal requirements.	[75]

Establishing a therapeutic alliance with a young adult patient on an individual basis or with the patient and their parents is the first stage (see Table 2) Involvement between the patient and the physician, a therapeutic alliance that involves the youngster and the parent, and joint treatment decision-making are all necessary for providing high-quality care in psychiatry [62]. Given that many adults and young people view the Internet as their only means of interacting with others, discussion of the negative elements of Internet use may be met with resistance. To fully comprehend and address each patient's needs, it is essential to investigate their beliefs, norms, values, cultural and linguistic context, and personal interpretations of technology [63].

Presently, the digital platform presents numerous challenges that have considerably affected the well-being and mental health of our youth. Online harassment and Cyberbullying have become widespread painful issues in our society, worsened by obscurity and internet access, resulting in severe psychological distress and anxiety. Digital media platforms, no doubt offer ways of self-expression, yet they impose naïve beauty standards and substitute negative body image insights. Understanding the complex digital challenges is an indispensable step for nurturing a healthy and balanced contact with technology. Cyberbullying is one of the main problems with technology that teenagers are facing. Due to the widespread use of social media, places intended for communication have become havens for harassment. Cyberbullying can take many different forms, from nasty remarks to the dissemination of false information. It has a detrimental effect on teenagers' mental health by encouraging emotions of loneliness, anxiety, and sadness. Social media's well-manicured exterior places pressure and unreasonable expectations on teenagers. Body image issues and low self-esteem are frequently caused by exposure to images of "perfect" bodies, lives, and experiences. One digital barrier that kids face as they try to fit into an idealized online world is the desire for affirmation through likes and comments.

As more teenagers reveal personal information online, the growing problem of online privacy becomes more pressing. People are exposed to possible risks like identity theft and online predators since it is difficult to distinguish between appropriate sharing and excessive sharing. For today's youngsters, finding a balance between protecting privacy and keeping up a digital presence is a constant problem. Technology has transformed schooling, but it has also presented new challenges for teenagers. Study habits and attention are hindered by the ubiquitous connectivity that laptops and cell phones provide. Teenagers attempting to satisfy academic expectations face a challenging environment as a result of the culture of comparison fostered by social media and the pressure to perform academically. Teens who spend too much time on screens face two problems. Even though technology provides a wealth of educational and recreational opportunities, extended screen time negatively affects mental health by raising stress levels, upsetting sleep cycles, and increasing stress levels. For teenagers in the digital age, finding a balance between using technology for enrichment and giving mental health priority is still a constant struggle. Teenage relationships now face new challenges as a result of the digital age, such as navigating online romantic interests and forming connections with peers across the globe. Key components of teenagers' digital journeys include comprehending the nuances of online

communication and differentiating between genuine connections and surface-level exchanges.

Internet usage can range from beneficial to detrimental Psychiatric educators need to learn about technology to help trainees gain clinical expertise in assessing patients, particularly PIU. A comprehensive media history is a crucial part of a mental health assessment, particularly for adolescents and tweens. Several informers, such as parents, teachers, the youngster's primary care physician, and/or other people who are familiar with the young person can help to improve the assessment of the youth hence standardizing media usage as most normal people do, nevertheless, is also crucial.

It's important to have an open-minded conversation with parents and youth about the variety of use from healthy to hazardous. [76]. To address the health, education, and entertainment needs of each child as well as the needs of the entire family, the American Academy of Pediatrics, for instance, has developed the Media and Communication Toolkit and Family Media Use Plan, which emphasizes the family as a whole and may be less difficult and offending. Numerous aspects i.e. the patient's behavior or problems make evaluation difficult [77], which depends on the patient's age and progressive stage. The growing brain may be more affected by technology than the mature brain [78]. Highly problematic online usage and "internet gaming disorder" have been proposed as a condition that needs vast study. "Gaming disorder" has recently been included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) classification framework. It's characterized by a pattern of gaming behavior (i.e., digital/video gaming) that includes losing control over gaming, giving gaming more importance than other activities to the point where it trumps interests and daily activities, and continuing or increasing gaming even in the face of negative outcomes.

The Internet use intensity and other factors, including peer habits, family rules and expectations, technology availability, and environmental aspects of the individual, should be assessed by the clinician to better understand the factors that support or sustain problematic use of the internet. This is because Internet use is in a state of dynamic interaction with contextual and activity-related factors. When it's appropriate, asking patients whether they would want to show doctors examples of their social media posts can help clinicians learn more about their hobbies, morals, and routines. In general, broad measures about behaviors, time spent using/exposure to technology, and exposure to "content" are required. Standardized examinations are frequently used in studies that examine how technology affects academic success and other behaviors [79].

Educating the patients about appropriate internet use and the risks associated with excessive screen time (i.e. disturbed sleep, worse academic and social performance, and a worsening of pre-existing psychopathology) is beneficial to youth and families. Arranging motivational interviewing techniques can help in collaboratively creating a strategy that aligns with the patient's goals and values (see Table 3). Determining the factors/procedures that resist excessive internet use is beneficial to boost the mental health of students. If a treatment plan outlines substitute activities that could satisfy excessive and overuse of internet activities' emotional requirements, it can play a high role in combating the curse.

Table 3: Education, advice, and treatment principles for excessive use of the Internet

Aspect	Description
Education	Provide information about healthy internet use and the risks associated with excessive use.
Awareness Building	Encourage self-reflection on internet habits and their impact on daily life.
Setting Limits	Help individuals establish boundaries on daily internet use to promote balance.
Coping Strategies	Teach alternative coping mechanisms for stress and boredom that do not involve internet use.
Support Systems	Encourage involvement in social activities and offline relationships for emotional support.
Professional Help	Recommend seeking therapy or counseling for severe cases of internet addiction.
Skill Development	Foster skills in time management and self-discipline to reduce excessive use.
Monitoring Tools	Suggest the use of apps and tools that track internet usage to raise awareness of habits.
Digital Detox	Encourage periodic breaks from the internet to reset habits and improve well-being.
Community Programs	Promote participation in community or support groups for shared experiences and strategies.

3. CYBERBULLYING A CHALLENGING ISSUE

Disinhibiting and the sharing of inappropriate images are two examples of problematic social media activities. More extreme instances include cyberbullying, online bullying, sexting, straightforward exploitation, and other addictive behaviors [80]. Sending, receiving, or sharing explicit messages, photos, or other visuals that contain sexually suggestive information is known as sexting. This can happen in conversations between persons who are not yet in a relationship, between romantic partners, and/or between people who are not in a primary relationship. As the number of devices with Internet connection has increased, sexting has grown more widespread. Although it is practiced by people of all ages, the majority of media attention concentrates on the negative effects on tweens, teenagers, and young adults, who use text messaging more than any other new media to communicate sexually explicit messages [81]. Ultimately, however, there is still disagreement over the terminology, so reaching a consensus is crucial to accurately assessing the activity and modifying prevention [82].

Scientific research has produced a wealth of information about bullying and cyberbullying, and teenagers who are reported experiencing online bullying are increasingly alerting i.e. 60% in 2014 compared to 40% in 2013. Cyberbullying is the deliberate and persistent harm (e.g. threatening, dehumanizing, or harassing text messages or photographs) sent via mobile phones, interactive technology, or the Internet . More than 40% of American teenagers (of the age group between 13-17 years) said that they had been the victim of cyberbullying at some point in the previous year. On the other hand, 11.5% of teenagers acknowledged engaging in cyberbullying. The likelihood of cyberbullying victims is higher for girls (>40%) compared to boys (29%). Boys are more likely to play video games than girls, but girls also dominate social media. In severe circumstances, peer

victimization brought on by cyberbullying has a clear correlation with a higher risk of suicide. Compared to traditional bullying, being the victim of cyberbullying has a stronger correlation with suicide ideation. Teens are not the only ones affected by this problem. According to a recent meta-analysis, this phenomenon holds for both younger and older kids, males and girls, and kids who bullied and were bullied themselves. For kids in grades 3-5, simply having a cell phone greatly raises the risk of cyberbullying [83].

Around the world, 72% of teenagers game online. Playing video games is a common pastime for kids and young adults. Online and in-person pals can play a lot of video games, regardless of whether they are console, web, or computer-based. The ability to create alter egos or fictional versions of oneself is made possible by the perceived anonymity of players and the use of avatars. This feature of gaming is fun, but it also allows users to harass, bully, and occasionally group up with other players by sending or posting hurtful or negative messages and using the game as a tool for harassment. When a child doesn't perform well, other kids might curse at them, make cruel comments that escalate into bullying, or stop them from playing altogether. Anonymous players might use the game to harass strangers or obtain private information about them, such as usernames and passwords [84].

Parents and adults should learn how the game operates and what kind of content a child is exposed to, play it yourself, or watch others while they play to stop children from being cyberbullied while they are gaming. Moreover, parents/teachers should talk to their children/students regularly about who is playing the game with them and who is online. Further, instruct young people in safe online conduct, such as avoiding clicking on links from strangers, keeping personal information private, abstaining from other players' bullying, and knowing what to do if they witness or are the victim of bullying. Set limits on how much time a kid or adolescent can spend playing video games.

Many victims have limited information on how to report cyberbullying and existing laws are not sufficient or effectively enforced. Therefore, victims feel ashamed/fear social repercussions thus high-risk behaviors may be seen as a way to fit in with peers due to insufficient access to mental health services [82]. Mental health-related issues are often stigmatized, and discourage patients from seeking help, hence continuous excessive usage of the internet results in addiction. Undue online activities result in boredom from study as students like to spend more time in their favorite online interests. Prolonged screen time causes physical health problems such as eye strain.

Cyberbullying, high-risk behaviors, and excess online activity can be prevented through policy changes, education, and accessible support systems. For this, there is a dire need to implement effective programs in universities/colleges/schools to educate students about the devastating effects of cyberbullying and how to prevent it. Updating and strictly enforcing cybercrime laws can help to discourage cyberbullying. Moreover, provide confidential support services for victims and conduct campaigns to educate about the concerns of high-risk behaviors for good control of Cyberbullying, high-risk behaviors, and excess online activity, increased support services and mental health counseling may helpfully Educate individuals about maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities, hence, promote open and de-stigmatized discussions about mental

health. Encourage setting limits on screen time to avoid negative impacts on academics and health. Implement programs that promote periodic breaks from digital devices to improve overall well-being [85].

CONCLUSION

The present study emphasizes the key role of parent-adolescent communication in preventing cyberbullying among youth. Effective communication serves as a protective factor, equipping adolescents with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate safely the digital world. Yet, parents who keep an open communication, express frank interest in the online activities of their children, and guide them without being unpleasant raise a sense of security and trust. This environment allows youth to get support and motivation to report cyberbullying cases, decreasing the possibility of long-term retaliatory behavior. Various approaches like resources and educational programs that can enhance parental alertness of cyberbullying and digital learning can play significant roles in combating this dangerous issue. These motivations may focus on training parents with practical approaches to be involved in critical conversations about probable risks related to digital communications, online behavior, and privacy. Moreover, promoting a cooperative approach that comprises the collective effort of universities, communities, and technology-forming companies can help better to create a safe online ecosystem. There is a need to invest in future studies exploring advanced techniques to support and enhance communication means in youth exploiting positive and safe online experiences.

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